

Synopsis

Ethiopia: Overprints on the 1919 Animals & Rulers Definitives

PURPOSE

This exhibit presents the overprinted 1919 Animals and Rulers definitives and the postal rates used between 1919 and 1928.

EXHIBIT LAYOUT

The exhibit layout consists of 7 sections: 1919 Original Substitute Issue; First Provisionals; Provisionals without Rosettes; Provisionals with Rosettes – Narrow Spacing; Provisionals with Rosettes – Wide Spacing; Postage Dues; and Officials.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The overprints on the 1919 definitive stamps were produced by the A. Desvages Printing Press located in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The workers who actually ran the press operations were literate, thus as individual type elements came loose and fell out, they were not necessarily replaced in the proper place. This gave rise to a variety of printing errors ... many of which saw legitimate postal usage.

The 1919 Original Substitute issue was created to replace the 4 Guerche definitive stamps featuring then Crown Prince Ras Tafari wearing the Ethiopian gold crown. As Tafari was not yet crowned King, the reigning Empress Waizeri Zauditu had this stamp withdrawn from circulation and replaced it with a 4 Guerche provisional overprint on the 4 Thaler stamp bearing her image.

The First Provisional overprints were produced in response to a global silver devaluation resulting in new postal rates. In addition, many of the low value stamps that had little practical use were overprinted to make them postally usable.

Key Feature: Amharic value is spelled out and appears on two lines above the value appearing in French

The Provisionals without Rosettes were generally produced on the higher value definitives that had little practical value as well as to make additional stamps available in values that corresponded to another rate change.

Key Feature: Amharic value appears on one line above the value appearing in French

The Provisional with Rosettes – Narrow Spacing were produced in order to maintain compliance with U.P.U. rules that required the original value of the stamp to be obliterated when revalued as well as to use higher value stamps that had limited postal usefulness.

Key Feature: Amharic value appears on one line 4-6 ½ millimeters above the value appearing in French

The Provisional with Rosettes – Wide Spacing were produced in order to use higher values stamps that had limited postal usefulness.

Key Feature: Amharic value appears on one line 10 ½ - 15 millimeters above the value appearing in French

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Little is known about the Postage Due overprints. This is one of the few overprints having a number of documented forgeries. Only a few covers are known with usage of these stamps. It is not clear if they were used as regular postage or as postage due stamps.

It is not certain why the Official overprints were produced. There are none known used for official purposes. A couple of covers are known to have been used as regular postage, but it is unknown if they were philatelic or used as postage by mistake.

CHALLENGE FACTORS

This particular era, good examples of used postal history are of medium difficulty to find. The examples on display in this exhibit represent a decade of collecting. While only 3 of the overprints (4 including the postage dues) have been forged, fraudulent covers from the 1919 to 1928 time period are not uncommon and are not infrequently offered by eBay and by major big name auction houses. One needs to understand what post marks and post offices were extended and in use at this time. From 1928 through the 1970s, several individuals had access to a variety of cancellers and doctored up a number of genuinely travelled covers with Ethiopian stamps and cancels.

RARITY & DIFFICULTY OF ACQUISITION

Overprinted & Essay Stamps: With the exception of 3 values, difficulty of acquisition of the basic overprinted stamps is minimal. The difficulty associated with the overprinted stamps lies in assembling the various overprint errors.

Specimens: No specimen stamps are known to exist. Rather the overprints were done on thin paper in sheets of 50. About a half dozen sheets or partial sheets are known to exist. One such sheet for an unissued value is included in this exhibit.

Postage Due Stamps: The postage due stamps are elusive. Both genuine and forged values are very difficult to find. I have not seen a complete set offered at auction since 1997.

Official Stamps: These are the most elusive of all of the overprinted values. Other than the 12G value, I have never seen these appear at auction or for sale. I have only been able to assemble a set of these through buying collections that have included a value or two over a period of some 10 years.

Traveled Covers: As discussed above, traveled covers leaving Ethiopia between 1919 to 1928 are of medium difficulty to locate. A few appear at various auctions and on eBay with some regularity. The bulk of these covers are franked with 2 to 4 Guerches. Single franking using a single 6 or 8 Guerche stamp is rare which helps explain why the bulk of these values were revalued to ½ or 1 Guerche. Nonphilatelic franking over 8 Guerches are very rare as most items over this amount would have been parcel post items. Due to the illiteracy in early Ethiopia,

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nonphilatelic internal mail is scarce and rare. Imprinted mail and newspaper wrappers leaving Ethiopia during this time is also rare.

REFERENCES

Ethiopia 1867-1936: History, Stamps and Postal History, Roberto Sciaky, printed 1999, Vaccari Press.

Ethiopia Booklet No. IV: The Issues of 1917-1936, Eric Payne, Cockrill Series Booklet No. 16, published 1981, Printed by Fox & Son, Bracknell, Berkshire, Great Britain.

Doig's Ethiopia Stamp Catalog, internet, <http://doig.net/EthiHome.html>.

Note: Ken's listing for the overprinted A&R stamps is not as clear and concise as the Payne booklet.